

"In violence, we forget who we are."

- Mary McCarthy

San Francisco Chronicle

INSIGHT

IDEAS • OPINION • COMMENTARY

SECTION

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Sunday,
July 31, 2005

HIROSHIMA | The birth of nuclear warfare

An ugly end, with or without the atom bomb

Compromise unacceptable for Truman

By Ronald Takaki

During the days before that fateful Aug. 6, 1945, Gen. Douglas MacArthur learned that Japan had asked Russia to negotiate a surrender. "We expected acceptance of the Japanese surrender daily," one of his staff members recalled. When he was notified that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, the general was livid. MacArthur declared that the atomic attack on Hiroshima was "completely unnecessary from a military point of view."

Why then did the president make the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima?

Harry Truman was an accidental president. He had been sworn into office only months earlier, when Franklin D. Roosevelt died suddenly on April 12. Truman admitted to his wife that he had little knowledge of foreign policy. Feeling inadequate to fill the shoes of the great FDR, he had to face indignities and sarcasm. In the streets, people asked, "Harry who?" and mocked him as "the little man in the White House." But Truman hid his insecurity behind a facade of toughness. Publicly, he presented himself as a man of the frontier. He blustered: "The buck stops here."

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History without Hiroshima — 10 million dead

By Richard B. Frank

What if the United States had chosen not to use atomic weapons against Japan in 1945?

Americans typically believe that an invasion of Japan would have been the consequence, but four other possibilities have been raised: a diplomatic settlement; Soviet intervention in the Pacific theater; continuing war with dire effects on millions of Asians trapped in Japan's empire; and a new strategic bombing directive.

Contrary to wishful theories, no realistic prospect existed for a diplomatic settlement. The American aim of unconditional surrender was not just a slogan. It constituted the keystone to the enduring peace

that followed. It provided the legal authority for the occupation of Japan and the ensuing fundamental renovation of Japanese society.

Japan's leaders opposed unconditional surrender precisely because they understood it meant the extinction of the old order dominated by the militarists and their consorts. That old order had started a war that killed more than 17 million people — most of them Asian noncombatants. The strongest evidence that compromised

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Gen. George Marshall, Army chief, advocated invasion.



President Harry Truman's ultimatum was rejected.



Gen. George Marshall, Army chief, advocated invasion.



Bomb photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force 1945, survivor portraits by JOHN FLINN / The Chronicle

How the U.S. got to Dr. Strangelove

Nuclear weapons changed the world

By William S. Kowinski

On July 16, 1945, the cruiser Indianapolis sailed from Hunters Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco, carrying one 15-foot crate. Inside were the components for the first atomic bomb destined to be dropped on a city. It was being shipped to Tinian Island in the western Pacific, and its final destination a few weeks later would be Hiroshima. It left San Francisco just four hours after the first successful atomic bomb test in history, in the New Mexico desert.

Sixty years is a long time to keep even such an immense memory alive, but several books published recently bring these events into sharper focus than ever before.

Several are biographies of key figures like Robert Oppenheimer and Edward Teller, but one is billed as a biography of the bomb itself. "The Bomb: A Life" by Gerard DeGroot (Harvard University Press), professor of modern history at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, benefits from newly available records, especially con-



Robert Oppenheimer



Edward Teller

It did explode, with such brightness that a woman blind from birth traveling in a car some distance away saw it.

"A colony on Mars, had such a thing existed, could have seen the flash," DeGroot writes. "All living things within a mile were killed, including all insects."

America was now in sole possession of the most powerful weapon in history. The first effect of the bomb was in Potsdam, Germany, where President Harry Truman was conferring with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and

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50,000 survivors

Some Hiroshima residents still carry the scars of the living hell that rained down on the city

By John Flinn
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

At 8:15 a.m., Michiko Yamaoka, 15, had just left her home and was walking to her job at the Hiroshima Central Telephone office, where she worked as a switchboard operator.

There had been an air-raid warning earlier Sunday, Aug. 6, 1945, but at 7:31 a.m. the all-clear siren had sounded. Yamaoka hurried through a corridor where homes and shops were being demolished to create a fire break. American B-29s had been raining firebombs mercilessly on Japan's other cities, and no one knew why Hiroshima had so far been spared. But everyone believed an attack was coming.

A mile away, on a little hill to the west, 16-year-old Yoshinori Obayashi was bent over a lathe in a makeshift workshop, fashioning parts for torpedoes. A senior in high school, Obayashi and his classmates had been mobilized to work in munitions factories. He'd just been transferred from the Tenma-cho factory in the city center to the temporary shop in Koi on the town's western outskirts — a move that would save his life.

At the same moment, 8-year-old Sakae Okuda was flinging open the front door of his home. Like other Hiroshima schoolchildren, he'd been evacuated to the countryside,

Location of the three survivors, whose stories are recounted here, when the atomic bomb hit Hiroshima.

① Michiko Yamaoka

② Sakae Okuda

③ Yoshinori Obayashi



and he'd spent the last few months living in a Buddhist temple at Hatsuakaichi, 25 miles away. His grandmother had been sent along to take care of him, but she'd fallen ill. So early on the morning of Aug. 6, they rode a train back to town and then a tram to their neighborhood. Okuda's grandmother went immediately to the Furusawa Clinic next door to their home, and the boy pushed open his front door and called to his older brother.

Today in Hiroshima, there live 50,000 survivors.

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TODD TRUMBULL AND JOE SHOULAK / The Chronicle

Hiroshima at home

What would happen if a bomb the size of "Little Boy" was detonated in San Francisco.

B2

Fire next time

Insight's Two Cents panel weighs in on the question: "Who will be next to use nuclear weapons?"

B2

Heisenberg principle

The German A-bomb program provided the urgency to create the U.S. Manhattan Project.

B3

Road to annihilation

The decision to drop the A-bomb grew out of a web of history, politics and strategy.

B3

Truman policy led to blast

► TRUMAN
From Page B1

Like many Americans, the president was swept into a rage for revenge for the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. This rage had been racialized. Truman repeatedly blasted the enemy as the "Japs." This racist term identified the enemy as the Japanese people, a contrast to the term "Nazis," which refers only to the followers of Hitler. Truman also dehumanized the enemy in the Pacific war. Disturbed by Pearl Harbor and the Bataan death march, Truman argued: "When you have to deal with a beast, you have to treat him as a beast."

These dynamics drove Truman to rigidly insist on unconditional surrender, a demand he had inherited from Roosevelt. But for Roosevelt, it had been only a slogan to help rally the war effort.

Truman made the demand a policy. In July, he refused to heed the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of War Henry Stimson that the president negotiate a peace by allowing Japan to continue the emperor system. News of the successful test of the atomic bomb boosted Truman's confidence that he could bully Japan. In the Potsdam Declaration of July 26, Truman issued a fierce ultimatum: Japan must accept "unconditional surrender" or face "utter devastation."

Japan refused, and Truman ordered the atomic attack. The first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on Aug. 6. As many as 75,000 people were instantly incinerated. Most of them were women and children. Three days later, the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

But the Japanese government still refused to surrender unconditionally. At that point, Truman decided to allow Japan to keep the emperor. Had he made such an offer earlier, he might have been able to end the war before dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

The atomic bombings were not widely accepted in the United States. A poll conducted by Fortune magazine in December 1945 found that only 54 percent of the respondents approved of the atomic bombings. The major news media also voiced apprehension and disquietude. Time magazine wrote that "the demonstration of power against living creatures instead of dead matter created a bottomless wound in the living conscience." The New York Times issued a sobering message: "We have been the first to introduce a new weapon of unknowable effects which may bring us victory quickly but which will sow the seeds of hate more widely than ever. We may yet reap the whirlwind."

The day after the devastation of Nagasaki, Truman privately told a Cabinet member that "the thought of wiping out another 100,000 people was too horrible," and that he did not like "the idea of killing all those kids." His anguish revealed a conflicted self. The Japanese were not simply an enemy race, they were human beings. Beneath Truman's toughness was also a thoughtful and sensitive individual who saw the world hurtling toward an uncertain and fearful future.

On July 16, while waiting for the news of the atomic test, he reflected in his diary on the "absolute ruin" of Berlin and the long history of warfare, including Carthage and Rome. Turning to the war before him, he ruminated: "I hope for some sort of peace — but I fear that machines are ahead of morals by some centuries, and when morals catch up perhaps there'll be no reason for any of it. I hope not. But we are only termites on a planet and maybe when we bore too deeply into the planet there'll be a reckoning — who knows?"

Ronald Takaki, who wrote this article for Pacific News Service, is professor of ethnic studies at UC Berkeley and the author of "Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb." Contact us at insight@sfchronicle.com.

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HIROSHIMA | The birth of nuclear warfare



HIROSHIMA | The birth of nuclear warfare

Thank God for the atom bomb — or not?

Historical reasons for, against use

By William M. Burke

Several decades after the fact the noted literary scholar and combat infantryman Paul Fussell wrote an article, "Thank God for the atom bomb," in which he described his feeling of relief when, in August 1945, he realized that he would not have to land on some hostile Japanese beach after he had just come away, limping, from a German battlefield.

The question came up again 10 years ago, when the Smithsonian Institution announced an exhibition featuring the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the Hiroshima bomb, plus a catalog containing arguments (pro and con) regarding the wisdom of dropping the bomb. But then Charlton Heston, the American Legion and most of the Washington establishment jumped into the fray, denouncing all the critical comments, so the exhibition was canceled and the unfortunate curator who organized the event was out of a job.

Obviously, it's time to review some ancient history, beginning with how we all arrived where we were in 1945. Actually, the road to Pearl Harbor, and to Hiroshima, began in Berlin in 1918, when Imperial Germany, which had seemed unbeatable, suddenly felt the weight of wartime shortages and collapsed into a state of chaos and famine. Japan's political and military leaders, who had built their state on the German model, suddenly felt very vulnerable and vowed to follow a policy of self-sufficiency at all costs. But in their view, they could obtain self-sufficiency only through economic and/or political control over the resource-rich Asian mainland.

Throughout the 1930s, Japanese armies rampaged through north China, organized the puppet state of Manchukuo, and then, in the summer of 1939, ran into a Russian army under Gen. Georgi Zhukov at the Mongolian border town of Nomonhan. Staggering away with 17,000 casualties from that disastrous encounter, the Japanese turned their eyes to more tempting opportunities to the south — the orphaned French and Dutch colonies set adrift by Hitler's European conquests. *see 39*

But throughout this period, Japan's leaders failed to see that the military buildup associated with their self-sufficiency drive made Japan economically dependent on the one country that was bound to



BRANT WARD / The Chronicle 1994

The submarine Pampanito, now in San Francisco, patrolled the Pacific during World War II as part of an American effort that reduced Japan's oil imports to a trickle.

contest that buildup, the United States. In the late 1930s, the United States provided practically all of Japan's imports of critical materials — 75 percent of its scrap iron, 60 percent of its machine tools, 93 percent of its copper, and above all, 80 percent of its petroleum imports.

Japan seemed oblivious to the strong support throughout America for the beleaguered Chinese government and failed to see the conflict between its ever-greater dependence on American supplies and America's rapidly growing need to bolster its own rearmament program begun in response to Hitler's European triumphs.

At a July 1941 Cabinet meeting, FDR agreed to impose export controls and to freeze all Japanese assets in this country. The system supposedly had some flexibility, but it soon hardened into a full-scale embargo on all trade with Japan. To the targeted nation, that was a *casus belli*.

British and American editorialists had cheered loudly in 1904, when the plucky Japanese began the Russo-Japanese War with a surprise attack on Port Arthur in Manchuria. But editorialists had a different response in December 1941, when the Japanese fleet staged a similar surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

One military disaster after another quickly followed. As Winston Churchill said in his memoirs, "The violence, fury, skill and might of Japan far exceeded anything we had been led to expect."

Yet only six months after Pearl Harbor, the tide turned inexorably. The Americans, who had broken the Japanese code, sank four irreplaceable aircraft carriers, and from then on Japan was on the defensive throughout the Pacific.

If America's military and political leaders had been less myopic, they would have realized from the outset that Japan, as a resource-poor island nation, could not survive without access to overseas sources of oil and the other ingredients for making war. The best tool for cutting those supply lines was a first-rate submarine service, but that (alas) was unavailable for the first two years of war.

Almost one-third of all submarine commanders were replaced during 1942 because of their excessive caution. Early torpedoes were useless, sailing below the target and failing to explode. (Since they cost \$10,000 apiece, they were rarely used in training.) But finally everything came together, and by late 1944 Japan's fate was sealed.

Aggressive sub commanders, using wolf pack tactics and very effective weaponry, reduced Japan's bulk imports by half and its oil im-

ports to a trickle. With 140 submarines on patrol, America's "silent service," accounting for only 2 percent of total naval personnel, deserved a major share of the victory in the Great Pacific War. Along with the other major events of late 1944 — the capture of the Marianas and the Battle of Leyte Gulf (the largest naval battle in history) — the submarine victory decided the course of the war.

If American policy-makers had been more rational, in late 1944 they would have tailored their policies to Japan's true situation as a defeated and isolated island nation. After the small fleet of American submarines had gained its stranglehold over Japan's lifeline,

policy-makers should have suspended all other operations and waited patiently for Japan to negotiate a withdrawal from its overseas conquests. But considerations of this kind were ignored during the invasion-planning sessions in the Washington of 1945, and in the Smithsonian controversy in the Washington of 1995.

More than half of the 101,000 American battle deaths of the great Pacific War occurred between the summer of 1944 and the summer of 1945 — a figure roughly equal to all American deaths during the decadelong engagement with Vietnam. Japan's death toll was 25 times greater, and the

great majority of those 2.5 million deaths occurred in the final desperate months.

The crucial actors during that period were Gen. Curtis LeMay's bomber crews. A few years earlier, Americans had been outraged when German pilots killed about 1,000 civilians in the Basque town of Guernica — the subject of Picasso's famous painting. But then, in 1945, they cheered to the rafters when American pilots turned hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians into flaming torches with their firebombs in Tokyo and Osaka and their atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

And then, with the emperor's capitulation, Adm. William Halsey signaled the fleet, "The forces of righteousness and decency have triumphed." But as Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida noted in his first cabinet meeting, it is possible to lose a war and yet win a peace.

Among other achievements, the American occupiers imposed a major land-reform program, which brought prosperity to the Japanese peasantry and thereby made it possible for conservative politicians to gain a one-party stranglehold over the national government. The American occupiers also wrote, in a week's time, a new Japanese constitution, which is now one of the world's oldest

(and most popular). It contains a prohibition against most military activities.

The American occupiers set Japan firmly on the road to postwar prosperity. In 1949, they sent a Detroit banker to administer a dose of root-canal economics, and the following year, with the onset of the Korean War, they flooded Japan with military contracts (Japan's "Marshall Plan"). The rest is (economic) history. With its export orientation, Japan has delighted generations of American consumers but brought despair to generations of American manufacturers — and in the process has accumulated hundreds of billions of American IOUs.

But all this could have been accomplished without the firebombing of Japanese cities and the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Victory, and Japan's post-war success, didn't require our compatriots 60 years ago to transform tens of thousands of families on Tokyo's streets into blazing torches.

William M. Burke, a retired Federal Reserve economist, served in the Navy during the Normandy campaign and worked as a translator in Tokyo during the occupation period. Contact us at insight@sfchronicle.com.

Nazi nuke program spurred U.S. A-bomb development

By Cynthia Bass



Albert Einstein and others warned about German physicists working on atomic fission.

even if you kick out one-fourth of your physicists, you still have plenty left — and this meant a lot of talent.

Some of this talent — Nobel laureates Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark, for example — were ardent and outright Nazis. The majority, though, were politically neutral.

The physicist epitomizing this neutrality was Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg, most famous for his insight into quantum mechanics called the uncertainty principle (that it is impossible to predict with absolute certainty where an atom will be). An ardent nationalist, though never a Nazi (the Nazis disliked him enough to sic the SS on him), Heisenberg not only stayed in Germany when he could have easily left, he eventually headed the Reich's atom bomb research.

This neutrality displayed by their one-time compatriots greatly disturbed the émigré physicists as they watched the Nazi contagion spreading over their homeland. This concern turned into near panic in early 1939, when articles in the German scientific journal *Naturwissenschaften* and its English counterpart *Nature* rocked

physics.

These articles concerned an experiment performed in Berlin on Dec. 19, 1938, six weeks after Kristallnacht, by radiochemist Otto Hahn. He had been bombarding uranium with slow neutrons, expecting to produce radium. Instead he produced barium, a totally different element.

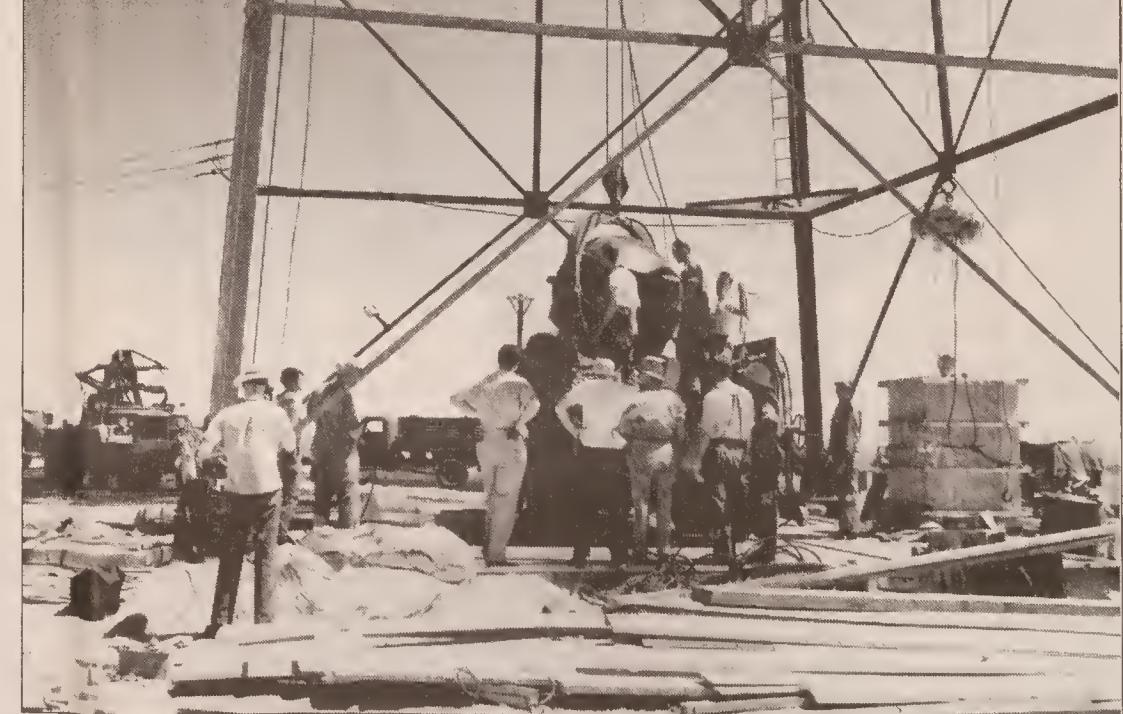
Confused, he sent his results to his former partner, Jewish physicist Lise Meitner, now in exile in Sweden.

Meitner was not confused. Realizing Hahn had split a uranium atom, Meitner began to calculate the energy released by this fission, becoming known as the Jewish Mother of the Atomic Bomb, an honorific she despised.

Meitner determined that the process released 200 million electron volts, an enormous amount of energy from a single atom. Both Hahn and Meitner published the following month.

By the end of January, the details of both articles were known throughout physics and had appeared in the New York Times. Fission had been discovered. It now was theoretically possible to create a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction — and an atomic bomb.

The émigré physicists shuddered. Six years earlier, when the Reich was still young and in the process of testing its own power, their Aryan brethren had watched the expulsions in silence. Surely they would not have the guts to stand up and say no if asked by Hitler to build an atomic bomb.



The first atomic bomb is lifted into a 100-foot tower before it is tested in the New Mexico desert.

Thus did the fateful combination of respect for German physics and distrust of German physicists drive Albert Einstein and his compatriots, just as war erupted, to write a letter of warning to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. That led to the creation of the Manhattan Project, the top-secret Allied effort to build the atomic bomb before what the refugees feared most of all could happen: that Hitler would build it first.

For three years, Heisenberg and his Uranium Club made sporadic progress toward a self-sustained chain reaction designed to breed plutonium for an atomic bomb. But in June 1942, Albert Speer, Minister of Armament and War Production, asked Heisenberg pointedly whether this newfangled weapon, which was costing the

Reich a lot of money, was going to be ready anytime soon. In typical fashion, Heisenberg dithered and said probably not — but could he please keep getting the money anyway, just in case?

From then on, the Uranium Club was engaged in research only. It never produced a reactor, let alone an atomic bomb.

But with no Allied spies inside the German bomb projects, neither the émigré physicists nor the governments that had taken them in knew how poorly the Nazi A-bomb project was doing. They acted on what they did know (or thought they knew): The brilliance of German physics, combined with the already well-demonstrated compliance of German physicists, equaled an excellent chance for a German nuclear arsenal.

It was this intelligence failure that drove the Manhattan Project. Confident the Germans were progressing rapidly in this arms race and ignorant of the true state of their research, one month after Speer's talk with Heisenberg, the Manhattan Project was kicked into high gear.

In May 1945, Germany surrendered, and soon afterward we learned how hollow their bomb program was. But by then it was too late. In July 1945, the United States successfully detonated a test bomb. And on Aug. 6, 1945, the technical marvel that resulted from this botched intelligence was dropped on Hiroshima.

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San Francisco Chronicle

THE VOICE OF THE WEST

EDITORIALS

An investment in teachers

THE Leave No Child Behind legislation requires that by next year a "highly qualified teacher" be in place in every classroom receiving federal funds to help poor children.

There is no way many schools will come close to meeting that goal. In fact, schools face a nightmarish scenario in which many of the nation's most experienced teachers will soon reach retirement age. By some estimates, our nation's schools will need 2 million new teachers over the next decade alone.

Making matters worse, recent studies show that the best, and typically best paid, teachers are often in classrooms where students need the least help.

Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, a key Democratic supporter of the Leave No Child Behind law, has proposed bold new legislation to provide incentives to exemplary teachers to work in so-called "high need" schools.

Miller says it is crucial to provide more incentives to attract the best and the brightest into teaching — and to reward those working with children who are lagging far behind. "After the parent, the teacher is the most important person in the education of the child," he told us.

That's a self-evident statement that has yet to be translated into national policy. Miller's approach is consistent with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's notions of merit and "combat pay" which he promoted enthusiastically earlier this year. But those ideas have suddenly disappeared from the governor's political phrasebook.

Instead, Schwarzenegger is taking a punitive approach by promoting a voter initiative to lengthen the probationary period for new teachers, and make it easier for school districts to fire underperforming ones.

By contrast, Miller's ambitious but carefully-crafted Teacher Excellence For All Children, or TEACH Act — which has the backing of a range of organizations from the Business Roundtable to the National Education Association — would provide tuition grants of up to \$16,000 to aspiring teachers in "high need" subject areas and to give bonuses of up to \$12,500 to experienced teachers doing exemplary work. It would also provide funds to support programs with a proven track record that help improve the performance — and staying power — of beginning teachers.

Delta defense

WHEN Margit Aramburu took the job 12 years ago as the first executive director of the Delta Protection Commission, she — like most Californians — had never been to the Delta. As she grew to know the place, the Delta started to find its voice. With her retirement and the arrival of the next director this week, the Delta will need to learn to speak up.

Creeping urbanization in the Delta spurred then-state Sen. Patrick Johnston to put forward the legislation that created the Delta Protection Commission in 1992. The Delta commission was modeled on the Bay Conservation Development Commission, an agency credited with preserving the San Francisco Bay.

The Delta commission is a regional land-use planning agency charged with protecting the estuary's heart — the 492,000-acre "primary zone" — for wildlife, agriculture and recreation, and with

commenting on developments proposed for the outlying — "secondary zone" — lands. Its job is "to provide an ongoing sense that the Delta matters," Johnston said.

The Delta is, as Aramburu describes it, "a tapestry of uses" — many conflicting. Delta folk often are suspicious of government, yet slowly have embraced the idea of a strong regional voice.

They will need it. The commission's first decade was the easy one. From here on, it will have to go head-to-head with development interests from five counties and 11 cities intent on pushing urban sprawl up to the water's edge.

Assemblywoman Lois Wolk, D-Davis, is working on legislation to beef up the powers and broaden the scope of the Delta Protection Commission. It must do more than speak for the Delta. It must become a loud defender of this essential component of our state's natural health.

Miller's legislation (H.R. 2835) would double the amount the federal government already spends on professional development for teachers — funds he says are not always spent in the right places. "A lot of professional development consists of a Saturday morning listening to a motivational speaker," he said. "By Tuesday, it's back to what they were doing before with no real additional skills."

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to passage of Miller's legislation is that it would cost upwards of \$3.5 billion a year. Given the budget realities in Congress, it is hard to imagine Republicans embracing it. "Unfortunately, that is what stops all discussion," said Miller. "But stopping the discussion doesn't put an end to the need."

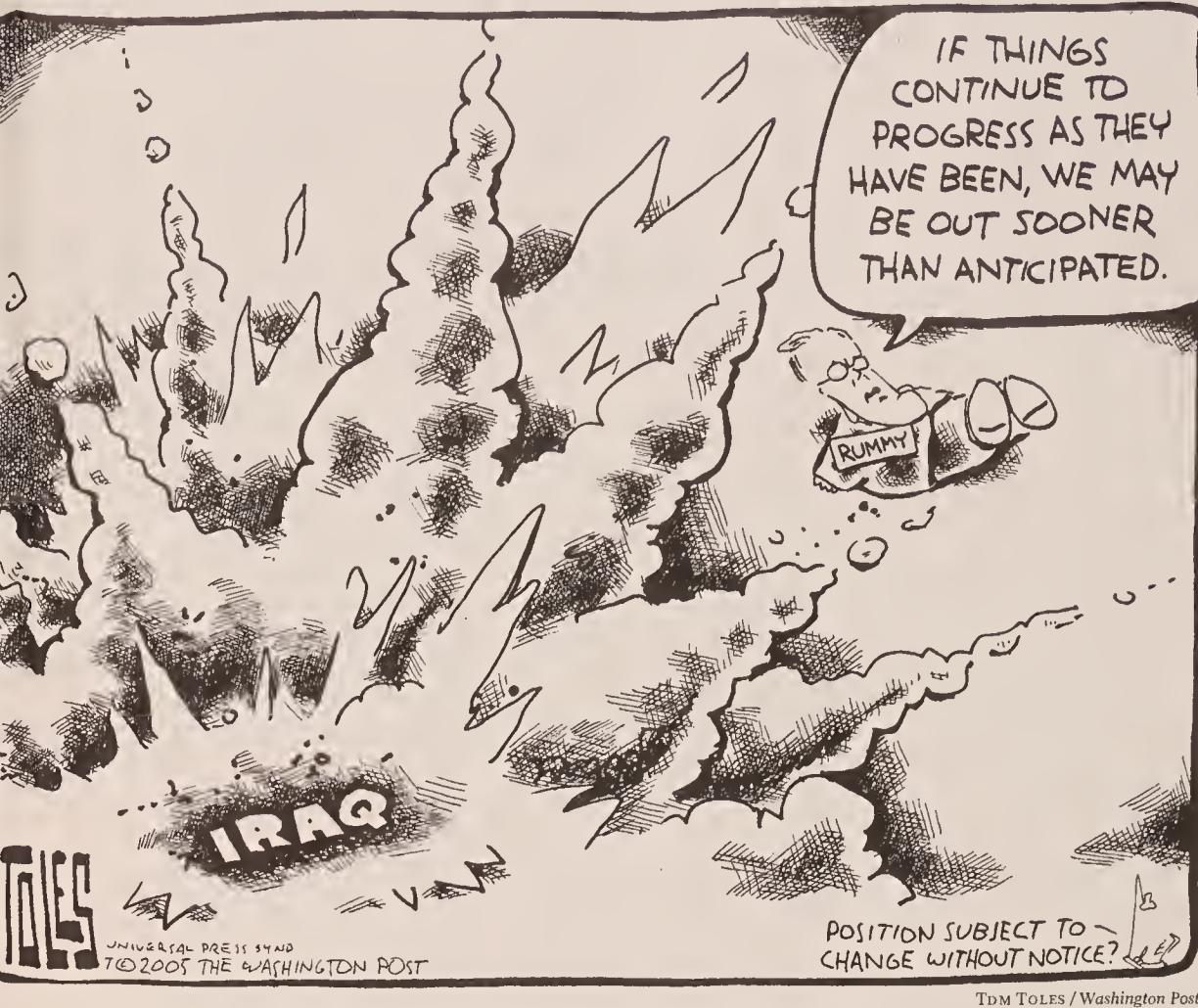
So far, the only legislators backing Miller's plan are Democrats, making the odds of it becoming law even more remote.

Stanford education professor Michael Kirst notes that typically it is only during times of crisis that concerns about teacher quality and supply surge. For example, the Soviet launch of the Sputnik in 1958 triggered passage of the National Defense Education Act. If Miller can link his legislation to our current pre-occupation with terrorism, Kirst says only half-jokingly, it might stand a better chance of passage.

That teachers are essential to our nation's security should not be a difficult argument to make. It would be a small leap for President Bush to embrace Miller's legislation as crucial to maintaining U.S. global hegemony, to ensuring we have a trained populace who will serve capably in our armed forces, and to cultivating scientists to develop the tools we need to combat terrorism.

For what we will get in return, spending \$3.5 billion on radically upgrading and motivating our teaching force is a pittance compared to the hundreds of billions of dollars we have already spent on waging the war in Iraq.

Miller was instrumental in getting Congress to approve President Bush's No Child Left Behind legislation. Now Bush should return the favor and endorse Miller legislation. As we build democracies abroad, at huge expense to the U.S. taxpayer, he could point out that an educated populace is essential to strengthening our own democracy.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't dismiss chemical risks in cosmetics

Editor — In her column, "Legislature hard at work producing too many silly bills" (July 24), Jill Stewart minimized meaningful efforts by the Legislature to address an important issue of worker health.

The truth of the matter is that for generations beauty-care workers have suffered a variety of occupation-related illnesses while receiving little attention from policy-makers.

In 1978 the General Accounting Office reported to the U.S. Congress on the "need for additional legislative authority" to regulate the safety of cosmetics. More than 25 years later, the Food and Drug Administration still does not review chemicals for their health and safety prior to marketing, nor impose bans of harmful ingredients in products. Loopholes in federal law still allow harmful ingredients to hide behind labels such as "fragrance."

It is hard to fathom why Stewart thinks it "silly" that workers and consumers be provided more complete information on what they apply to their bodies. Equally difficult to fathom is why she thinks it "silly" that state scientists be given authority to regulate chemicals of concern in the interest of public health.

The next time Stewart decides to be little legislative efforts that could significantly benefit California's working class, I hope she will choose to spend more time on substance and less time insulting the readers' intelligence.

NICK GUROFF
California organizer
The National Environmental Trust
San Francisco

Broader view of 'choice'

Editor — Katha Pollitt fears some Democrats are willing to jettison abortion rights — or "choice" — in order to "win back Catholics and evangelicals" ("Is it time for Roe vs. Wade to go away?" Insight section, July 24.)

If they really want to see a return to the fold, the Democrats should work to expand "choice" by letting parents spend their educational tax dollar where they see fit. Or perhaps they could fight those who want to restrict "gun rights?"

To do otherwise would be, to use a



RUSSELL YIP / The Chronicle
Cosmetics are not regulated for potential public-health risks.

word from Pollitt's semantically loaded piece, "anti-choice."

How did we get to the point where "choice" is limited to one subject?

JAMES O. CLIFFORD Sr.
Redwood City

Electronic health data

Editor — Many physicians and hospitals now keep your health records in electronic form, and more are doing so. When Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., calls for a greater investment in such records, he is actually calling for this process to be paid for and controlled by the government ("Why we must invest in electronic medical records," Open Forum, July 24).

Government control of a database of all of our medical records will yield few of the results promised by its supporters.

Eliminating paper will not eliminate mistakes. Mistakes, errors and incomprehensible information on computers will just replace those on paper. (None of us has ever experienced a mistake on computer records, have we?)

Records that can be accessed "in an emergency" by any hospital or clinic physician, health worker or administrator in the country cannot be secure or private. The idea that the best way to im-

prove privacy is to place all of our personal medical histories in a government database is ridiculous.

The federal government cannot deliver quality health care to everyone at a reasonable cost. It can only create new administrators, regulations and controls that will create additional cost.

Accurate electronic records can be helpful. But like the "magic wand" of managed care (remember how being pushed into HMOs was going to save us?), government-controlled medical records are an illusion of politicians. Creating such a system will give these senators the appearance of doing something, but will do little to improve health care, and much to increase government power.

RICHARD E. RALSTON
Executive director
Americans for Free Choice
in Medicine
Newport Beach

Ports of Oklahoma

Editor — Your editorial criticizing the recent U.S. Senate vote that showed a lack of any kind of rational approach to allocation of Homeland Security funds was right on target ("Homeland insecurity," July 24).

Pork-barrel politics, as usual, is outrageous in this case, and waste in the current system is intolerable. Segway people-movers for Santa Clara County? Come on!

However, for the sake of accuracy I would like to point out that the "great landlocked state of Oklahoma" does have ports, and there may very well be some legitimate reasons for trying to protect them. Many here are only vaguely aware of the vast inland waterway system at the center of our country, consisting of some 25,000 miles of navigable waters stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes.

Oklahoma participates in this system and has at least two significant ports. The spin that you created with the "great landlocked state" crack was effective and got your point across. But you were wrong.

The densely populated cities of the East and West Coasts are no doubt prime targets for our terrorist enemies, but people in the smaller cities of Oklahoma are at some risk and they aren't complete strangers to the impact of terrorist attacks in their midst.

They take terrorist attacks very seriously there, and don't seem to have much interest in buying toys with homeland security money. I am confident the funds spent to safeguard their ports will be well spent.

J. L. PALMER
Watsonville (Santa Cruz County)

Peninsula woes plague BART

Editor — Regarding "BART to halt many rush-hour trains to SFO" (July 26): I am puzzled and disappointed that on a "spare the air day" BART announced that it will once again be cutting service to SFO and Millbrae to "save money."

I have long-since abandoned using the new Peninsula stations because of infrequent service, and drive to Daly City BART instead, saving considerable time. Further reductions in service will make BART even less attractive.

Frequent, reliable service is most important to commuters. Why would BART spend billions of dollars building the SFO extension and then cut service to save money? Every time BART officials cut service, they lose passengers, resulting in — more cuts in service.

Instead of complaining about a lack of ridership, perhaps BART should improve service and do a better marketing job, as any business would. However, because no BART directors are from San Mateo County (which is outside the BART district), I don't see things changing. We know where the priorities are.

LEE SHEPARD

Redwood City



LIZ HAFALIA / The Chronicle

Peninsula ridership on BART is so far below projections that service has been cut.

Financial District, changing from Caltrain to BART at Millbrae, spends \$65 more a month on fares and arrives later than a commuter staying on Caltrain to Fourth and King streets.

BART adds a hefty fare surcharge for trips using San Mateo County stations, and another hit on top of that if you get off at SFO. Caltrain is increasing its popular Baby Bullet service, hoping to close its budget deficit by offering commuters a sweeter deal.

If BART and San Mateo County want their investment in the airport extension to pay off, cutting service is not the answer. Cutting the San Mateo fare surcharges might be.

CHARLES E. GALVIN Jr.
San Francisco

San Francisco Chronicle

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Real oversight in war on terrorism

By Ellen O. Tauscher

Like two bookends framing the war on terrorism, this month has seen the tragic suicide bombings in London and another report on alleged abuses of detainees at America's Guantanamo Bay prison. Both illustrate the stakes of this war and the tensions inherent in fighting it.

On the one hand, the London bombings remind us that radical ideologues pose an asymmetrical threat. The Sept. 11 attacks showed that the enemy is no longer a conventional army in uniform, but is comprised of terrorists acting alone or in small groups, targeting civilians. The need for accurate and timely intelligence is critical to combat terror as it surfaces in our own backyards.

On the other hand, the steady drip of disclosures about abusive tactics used at our facilities continues to undermine our efforts to convince the broader Islamic world that it must join us to isolate and defeat violent extremists. Until we can drain the swamp of potential al Qaeda sympathizers, we will face an ever-regenerating terrorist threat. And until we can restore our reputation as upholders of the rule of law, we endanger American troops around the globe who may well have become targets for abuse, if captured.

Faced with this daunting challenge, clear rules for engagement, detention, interrogation and processing of alleged terrorist prisoners are vital to ensure that we save American lives and reduce prisoner abuse excesses. It's crucial that Congress act to provide greater accountability for past abuses and current administration practices in the war on terrorism.

One of our first steps must be the creation of an independent commission to comprehensively consider all allegations of abuse at facilities where detainees are held and interrogated. Such an investigation ought to consider the

roles of the entire chain of command. While more than 50 investigations conducted by the Pentagon and 200 criminal investigations conducted by federal prosecutors and others shed some light on alleged abuse, they provide merely a sketchy patchwork of individual incidents, such as those at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. To wit:

► None of the investigations was independent and the most comprehensive, the Schlesinger panel, was hand-picked by the Secretary of Defense.

► None was able to look at the relationship between different facilities, agencies and practices. For example, the Department of Defense's Schmidt-Furlow report from earlier this month failed to examine links between alleged abuse at Guantanamo and subsequently in Iraq, all under the watch of Army Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller.

► While low-level enlisted personnel have been punished, none of the policymakers, senior officials or other architects of the detention and interrogation policies has been held accountable.

► Although some agencies outside the military are mentioned in these reports, no task force has investigated other significant involvements: the CIA's role in handling "ghost detainees" as well as the role of Navy Judge Advocate General officers, civilian contractors, Defense Department and White House leadership involved in setting detention policy.

As a second step, the Pentagon should immediately implement corrective procedures. I believe Congress should be afforded its proper oversight role and review reports submitted by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other human-rights organizations about American detention and treatment of prisoners in the war on terrorism.

In the case of Abu Ghraib, we now know that the International Red Cross



HARAZ GHANBARI / Associated Press

Under scrutiny: A detainee walks near a housing building in a medium-security facility at Guantanamo Bay prison last month. Reports of detainee abuse have prompted calls for greater oversight by Congress in seeing that procedures are in place to avoid further abuse.

alerted Defense Department officials to abuses taking place, yet the Pentagon dragged its feet in investigating. During that incident, Congress only learned of the ICRC reports after they were public knowledge and far too late to prevent egregious abuses. My colleagues and I must engage in serious oversight to ensure our military's international credibility — and we need a variety of tools at our disposal, including any information about possible misdeeds. By improving Congress' oversight capacity, we will have a greater chance of catching abuse as it occurs and will be better partners to help the Pentagon create systems and procedures that reduce the likelihood of abuse.

I believe there ought to be no higher priority today than giving our national security operatives the tools they need to protect our country.

The world has become more dangerous since Sept. 11, but that's no justification for turning our back on international norms and commitments. Misreating detainees puts our own troops at risk. It is also fundamentally unacceptable that we should slum in our role as humanitarian standard-bearer, after investing years of statesmanship paving the way for improved conditions and a better world.

As former Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote, "It is during our most challenging and uncertain moments that our nation's commitment to due process is most severely tested; and it is in those times that we must preserve our commitment at home to the principles for which we fight abroad."

Rep. Ellen O. Tauscher, D-Walnut Creek, represents California's 10th congressional district. She has served on the House Armed Services Committee since her election to Congress in 1996.

OPEN FORUM | Turning Point for Organized Labor

Labor needs a strong voice in politics

The civil war in the labor movement that led to this week's split in the AFL-CIO is the latest skirmish in a longer struggle. The same forces that helped make John Sweeney president of the union federation in the first place have now led the dissenting unions to denounce him and take a walk.

The movement's troubles are rooted in frustration over an environment that is increasingly hostile to organized labor, an economy that has hemorrhaged the sorts of industrial jobs unions organize best and a community of employers increasingly willing to resist unionization.

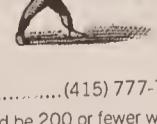
These facts led to Sweeney's election as an insurgent a decade ago. In defeating his friend Tom Donahue, the AFL-CIO's acting president, Sweeney promised much of what rebel leader Andy Stern now proposes, notably increased spending on organizing and a tougher response to a tougher environment.

In 1995, Sweeney asked the support of all who were "tired of being treated like so much road kill on the highway of American life." And in a line now freighted with irony, Sweeney declared: "As your president, I will never forget that our movement grows by addition and multiplication, and not by division and subtraction."

The ironies keep adding up: Sweeney was president of the Service Employees International, the same union Stern has just led out of the labor federation along with the Teamsters. Stern's cache now, like Sweeney's then, is based in large part

E. J. Dionne Jr.

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OPEN FORUM | Steering unions back to the center

By Eric Christen

on the SEIU's success: It invested more than most unions in organizing, and it grew fast. Ten years ago, Sweeney was the new guard replacing the old. Today, Stern is the insurrectionist against Sweeney's establishment.

By pulling out of the AFL-CIO and proposing to start a new organization, Stern and his Teamster ally James Hoffa — other unions may join them — are embarking on a laboratory test. "Our world has changed, our economy has changed, employers have changed," Stern has said. "But the AFL-CIO is not willing to make fundamental change."

The test is over which half of that statement is more important. If they succeed, Stern and Hoffa will show that labor's decline has been primarily the result of flawed strategy and tactics, which can be corrected. If they fail, the dissidents will become the victims of the same forces that have led to Sweeney's troubles.

The tragedy of labor is underscored by the reaction of its friends: There has been a great reluctance to take sides. Few know whether the split will invigorate the labor movement or cripple it. Few sense an obvious balance of right and wrong. The well-liked Sweeney represents loyalty and solidarity. Stern and Hoffa stand for impatience, determination and boldness. Labor needs all these virtues.

Whatever else Sweeney failed to do, he clearly built an effective political organization. In 2004, John Kerry carried Pennsylvania by defeating George Bush among voters living in union households (30 percent of the electorate) by 62-37 percent. Kerry lost the rest of the voters here, 55-45. In Michigan, Kerry won 61-37 in union households (37 percent of the electorate) and lost the rest, 55-44.

The problem, as Stern would insist, is that even in Pennsylvania, labor's share of the workforce has been cut by more than half over the last four decades. In the South and Southwest, the movement is even more enfeebled. Thus the chicken-and-egg question at the heart of this struggle: Labor needs to have a strong voice in politics to be successful, and it needs to be successful to have a strong voice in politics.

This split might at least remind liberals and Democrats of how much they have depended on the unions. Democrats have treated organized labor as a cross between an ATM and a temp service: politicians would show up to grab money and people at campaign time, but did little to maintain the machine and the workforce after election day. As the political philosopher Joni Mitchell put it, "You don't know what you got 'till it's gone."

It's too late to avert the split, but not too late to help revive a movement that has been essential to achieving social justice in the United States. For liberals, the Sweeney-Stern confrontation underscores the urgency of standing up for labor at its moment of crisis.

WASHINGTON POST WRITERS GROUP

Last week, we witnessed the historic breakup of the 50-year-old AFL-CIO. Ironically, this occurred barely a month before Labor Day, when we traditionally reflect upon and celebrate the role of union labor in the United States. At such a time, we should not only consider what has been done, but also what union labor now means and whether unions have a role in the future.

It's instructive to recall the genesis of the union labor movement and compare its original mission with its current positions. The father of the modern union movement was Samuel Gompers, legendary founder of the American Federation of Labor. Gompers made sure that labor kept its distance both from socialism (a growing threat at the time) and from partisan politics, focusing instead on organizing and winning concessions from business through collective bargaining.

In the first half of the 20th century, the AFL even refused to support minimum-wage legislation. In those days, labor was instead committed to the market economy and opted for what Gompers and associates called "trade unionism" pure and simple, the collective bargaining strategy on which workers of every political stripe could agree. If labor leaders did take a political stand, it was generally centrist, especially on social issues.

In 1968, when the United Auto Workers threatened to leave the AFL-CIO because of AFL-CIO founder George Meany's opposition to an alliance with activist leftwing intellectuals and students, Meany bid the UAW good riddance. With Meany's focus and centrist leadership, American unionism flourished throughout much of the last half-century.

But as union membership began to decline in the last three decades (35 percent of workers in 1960 were unionized versus roughly 10 percent today), the mission of the labor movement began to change radically. This was epitomized by the 1995 election of John Sweeney as the head of the AFL-CIO. Sweeney has shifted the union's focus from collective bargaining to aggressive political activism and partisan politics, one of the chief complaints of those unions now breaking away.

With the collapse of socialism and the rise of the information-and-technology age, along with the dynamic, interconnected world economy it represents, leftists like Sweeney (a card-carrying member of the American So-

cialist Party) have determined that the only way for unionism to survive at all is for two things to occur: force non-union workers to join unions, while making them pay for the pleasure, and encourage huge government growth, thereby creating more union jobs. To accomplish this, Sweeney has hitched his horse to the Democrat Party in no uncertain terms.

Sadly, this trend has come at the expense of the very workers the union claims to represent. For instance, despite the fact that the unions give so heavily to the Democrat Party, 43 percent of union workers themselves voted for President Bush in 2004, according to exit poll data. Though the National Labor Relations Act empowers unions to provide on-the-job representation for workers in terms of wages, benefits and working conditions, the union bosses of today prefer instead to serve as mouthpieces for an activist, radical political agenda.

So while union wages and benefits have remained stagnant for the past 20 years compared to the rest of the workforce, the movement's support for such non-union issues as illegal-immigrant amnesty, gun control, abortion rights and repeal of the death penalty have ascended. Although unions have a right to participate in politics, they should not finance their political activities through compulsory membership dues.

Simple fairness demands that union bosses not be permitted to extract dues and pretend they are going to such things as collective bargaining and contract negotiation when in fact (according to one audit from the Service Employees International Union) as much as half of it is going to political causes and nonbargaining activities. It is such coercion that has caused union representation to fall so dramatically. Add to this the fact that union bosses are increasingly being convicted of crimes, highlighted recently when the head of the United Teachers of Dade County, Florida (an AFL-CIO affiliate) pled guilty to embezzling hundreds of thousands of members' hard-earned dollars, and what you have is a movement that can't even be trusted by its members, let alone the American public.

As we bear witness to these historic times, we must re-evaluate the union labor movement. Unions were supposed to defend worker's rights, not trample on them. If the movement is ever to get back to the mission envisioned by George Meany then it must turn away from the partisan, anti-worker agenda of John Sweeney. Otherwise, should it continue on its current course, the American labor movement will likely not survive the new century, and rightly so.

Eric Christen is executive director of the statewide Coalition for Fair Employment in Construction (www.stoppla.com) in Sacramento,

How U.K. terrorists could win

"**W**HEN THEY try to intimidate us, we will not be intimidated. When they seek to change our country or our way of life by these methods, we will not be changed," British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced in the wake of the July London bombings.

With all respect to Blair, Great Britain will change. A country that once colonized corners across the globe now invites others to colonize London, and make it the most international of cities.

British laws will change. British immigration will work differently. And the British people, I think and hope, will end any romantic notions they may have had about suicide bombers.

The laws will change. No one will be happier about that than Tony Blair. In December, Parliament's Law Lords ruled that post-Sept. 11 laws that allowed detentions without trials of suspected terrorist figures — including figures who had publicly supported acts of terror while gaming U.K. political asylum laws — were illegal. At the time, judge Lord Hoffman wrote, "The real threat to the life of the nation ... comes not from terrorism but from laws such as these."

Last week, Blair told reporters that he didn't think "those words would be uttered now" in British jurisprudence. Expect British courts to change.

Blair is pushing anti-terror legislation that would allow authorities to detain suspects for more than 14 days. The Blair government also wants to create a new offense — "indirect incitement" to terrorism, preparing an attack and attending terrorist training camp.

Civil libertarians fear that free speech could be the first casualty of the incitement-to-terror measure. Where were they — I wonder — in 1986, when Parliament made incitement to racial hatred illegal and commenced some 40 prosecutions in the next five years?

Law enforcement will change, even if police are unlikely to be as armed as American police. The shooting of a suspect who turned out to be innocent appalled a public with little patience for gun violence. Be it noted, then, that authorities used a stun gun when they apprehended suspected July 21 bomber Yasir Hassan Omar last week.

Immigration policies already are changing, as the government — finally — seems poised to deport Islamic extremists who support terrorism to countries that had been off limits, because of poor human-rights records or support of the death penalty. Most notably, Abu Qatada — believed to be the spiritual adviser of Sept. 11 ringleader Mohammed Atta, would-be shoe bomber Richard Reid, and would-be U.S. terrorist Zacarias Moussaoui — should be headed for Jordan.

Bully for Blair, who has long understood that the United Kingdom's desire to welcome immigrants should not require it to smother its instinct for self-defense. No country should, or should feel it has to, harbor immigrants who preach violence against its citizens.

Cherie Blair better change. Three years ago, the P.M.'s wife, a human-rights lawyer, outraged many when she gave this dubious justification for Palestinian suicide bombers: "As long as young people feel they have no hope but to blow themselves up, you are never going to make progress."

Mrs. B. was in Malaysia last week. She had supported the December anti-detention ruling, and she shows little sign of changing her views, even if they seem at odds with her husband. As the Daily Telegraph reported, she warned against responding to "terror in a way which undermines commitment to our most deeply held values and convictions and which cheapens our right to call ourselves a civilized nation."

Perhaps Cherie Blair should listen to Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy. Kennedy, who is working with Blair to toughen law enforcement's ability to prosecute terrorists.

After Sept. 11, Kennedy had been among those who argued that if Brits "allow ourselves to get into a situation where in fact we are suppressing our individual rights, actually the terrorist begins to win."

You hear it in America, too: If we curb civil liberties, the terrorists win. It's a mindless mantra.

First, the terrorists don't want tough laws. They want loose laws, and when government fails to pass laws that make it easier to stop and prosecute them, the terrorists win.

People of good faith can differ on how Brit bobbies should be armed, or how long authorities should be able to detain terrorism suspects. But thinking people should be clear on this much: If the U.S. or U.K. governments are cowed by attacks and buckle by changing their policies, the terrorists *really* win.

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HIROSHIMA | The birth of nuclear warfare

Living witnesses tell of nuclear horror

► SURVIVORS
From Page B1

people who were there the day the atomic bomb exploded. Their generation is dying off, and many refuse to speak about the bomb. Others are eager to tell their stories as living witnesses of nuclear war. Three of them recently spoke with a Chronicle writer.

Hiroshima was one of four possible targets — the others were Kokura, Niigata and Nagasaki — but the skies over Hiroshima were clear that morning. At 2:45 a.m., a B-29 bomber, the Enola Gay (named for the pilot's mother), had taken off from Tinian Island in the Mariana Islands with the chubby, 12-foot-long bomb named Little Boy on board.

At 15 seconds past 8:15 a.m. over Hiroshima, the Enola Gay's bomb-bay doors swung open and out fell Little Boy, aimed at the unique T-shaped Aioi Bridge in the center of the city. Forty-three seconds later, the pilot, Col. Paul Tibbets, recalled that he felt a tingling in his teeth — what he believed were his fillings reacting to the bomb's radioactive forces.

Hurrying to her job at the telephone company, Michiko Yamaoka was half a mile from ground zero. "I heard an airplane overhead and I looked up and put my hand up to shield my eyes from the sun," she said. "Then I saw a tremendous flash of light — a bluish, yellowish flash. We called it *pika-don* — flash and sound. I don't remember hearing anything. But ever since then I've been deaf in my left ear, so there must have been a sound." Just as none of the five survivors interviewed by John Hersey for his book "Hiroshima" remembered hearing the explosion, none of those we spoke to could recall the sound, either.

"Almost immediately my face started to bloat," Yamaoka said. "I thought I'd been hit directly by a bomb and I was going to die. I said to myself, 'Goodbye, mother!'"

In Obayashi's makeshift factory, a mile and a half from ground zero, someone shouted and Obayashi turned to look out the window.

"A pale color shone. It was double the intensity of ordinary morning light," he said. "All of a sudden there was a tremendous blast and I fell to the ground. I was knocked down as the building fell in on top of me."

Young Sakae Okuda's home was six-tenths of a mile from ground zero. He had just walked in through his front door and called out, "I'm home!" His brother, who was two years older, came out from the back room and said, "Welcome home!"

"At that exact moment I saw the flash," he said. "It was reddish-blue. I was knocked unconscious. The house collapsed on me, and later, when I came to, I had to struggle to get out of the debris."

"The sky was dark, and things were falling from it — pieces of roofs and debris. It was so quiet."

Fifteen-year-old Yamaoka also lost consciousness for some time — maybe 15 or 20 minutes, she thinks.

"Finally I heard someone crying, 'Help me!' and I knew I wasn't dead," she said. "I was trapped under something. My legs were sticking out of the debris. I cried, 'Help me! Help me! Mother, teacher, help me!'"

"Then I heard my mother calling my name, and I yelled, 'Mother, I'm here, I'm here!' She couldn't get me out by herself. I heard someone yell, 'Lady, the fire's coming. Run for your life.' I could hear the flames crackling."

"But my mother wouldn't leave me. A soldier helped her move some things and I was able to crawl out."

"All around me was truly a living hell."



Associated Press 1945

Victims of the blast wait for first aid in the southern part of Hiroshima a few hours after the Enola Gay had dropped the atomic bomb on the heart of the city.

The people didn't look like human beings. They were naked, their hair was singed and their skin was peeling off. I saw a person on the ground without a head. People's intestines were spilling out of their bodies. People were dying right in front of me. They were screaming, 'Give me water!' People were jumping into the river."

The factory where Obayashi was working was flattened, but it was a temporary building, a barracks, and the roof and walls weren't heavy. As they fell, they were stopped by the heavy machinery. Obayashi, unhurt, was able to crawl outside.

"I looked back at the city and the mushroom cloud was rising up so big, so high into the air. I was so close I couldn't see the whole thing. The whole city was in flames. A little while later people started arriving from the city center. Everyone was horribly burned. We knew then that something terribly, terribly bad had happened."

As 8-year-old Okuda pulled himself out of the debris of his fallen house and stumbled toward the streetcar tracks, he heard his brother's voice. "He was still trapped under the house," Okuda said. "What could I do? I was just a little child. I looked around for someone who could help. All around people were lying on the ground. Their hair was burned and their faces were black. Pieces of glass and wood were sticking out of their blistered faces. Everyone was naked and burned. I couldn't ask them to help my brother."

"I could still hear my brother yelling, 'Please! Help me!' A woman who was maybe 20 or 25 came by and took my hand and told me I had to escape. I cried and asked her to help my brother. She told me a big American bomb had just exploded. I didn't know what kind it was. She was bleeding on her shoulder, and a bone was sticking out. I tried to go back to my brother but she didn't let me go."

"Dazed people were walking with their

arms extended out in front of them, with the skin peeling right off their arms and the tips of their fingers like zombies in the movies. Skin was hanging off their faces. They were walking and crawling without saying anything.

"I tried to pull away, but the woman insisted I come with her. 'Maybe there will be another bomb,' she said. We passed a streetcar engulfed in flames. People were crouching around it. They didn't have the energy to move. I was scared. I saw so many people terribly burned. The woman kept pulling me to go with her, from my brother."

Yamaoka and her mother fled toward Hijiyama Hill, where there was a military encampment.

"I passed a friend and she didn't recognize my bloated face. It was then that I started to feel the pain from my burns. When I got to the military base I lay down and someone put tempura oil on my burns. There were so many people on the ground who were dead and dying that you had to call out, 'Help me!' to let them know you were still alive. If you stopped screaming they assumed you were dead. There were people all around me on the brink of death, and already they were covered with maggots."

"I told my mother I wanted to die at home on my tatami mat, not here on the ground. She told me our house was gone. There was nothing to go back to. People told me that if I drank the water I'd die, so I drank lots and lots of it. I wanted to die."

Half an hour after the explosion, a strange rain began falling on the city. Soot and debris from the explosion had risen high into the atmosphere with the mushroom cloud, mixed with radioactive particles and then fallen back onto the city as a thick, oily, sticky black rain. It was highly radioactive.

Outside the remains of his factory, Obayashi and a co-worker took shelter under a piece of tin roof. "It was a torrential rain, falling in huge, black drops, and we didn't want to get wet," he said.

"We didn't know about black rain, didn't know it was dangerous. Getting under that piece of tin probably saved our lives."

He tried to spend the night in a dormitory with other survivors, but the stink of burned, rotting flesh was overpowering. "I couldn't stand it so I went outside and watched the flames from Hiroshima painting the sky. I stayed up all night looking at it."

The next day, he and some others went back to the city center to distribute some rice balls they'd made. But they had to abandon their cart because the streets were blocked with corpses. They reached the Tenma-cho factory, where Obayashi had originally been assigned to work, and found half-dead people, their skin gone and flesh hanging off their bones, crouching under pieces of tin and wood to escape the heat of the sun.

"Someone yelled 'air raid' and those of us who could hurried into an air-raid shelter. I'll never forget it: Inside was a pile of dead bodies. Their hair was standing on end, and their skin was black and red. Their arms were stiff, the skin peeled off, and their hands were reaching for the sky. We went to the next shelter, and the next, and they were all filled with the same thing."

Okuda never was able to go back for his brother. Refusing to let go of his hand, the woman walked him nearly 3 miles to the Kusatsu elementary school southwest of the city center, which was serving as an evacuation center. She turned the boy over to the teachers and vanished.

"Later, I looked for the woman, but I never saw her again, and I never knew her name," he said. "If I could meet her today I'd like to thank her for saving me. But I still cry when I think about my brother."

With most of his family dead or dying in Hiroshima's city center, the 8-year-old stood all alone in the school's playground that night and watched his city burn.

Today Okuda, 68, looks the picture of health, with a full head of black hair and a solid physique.

But, like so many other Hiroshima survivors, the effects of the radiation are still with him. Six days after the bombing, he came down with a high fever and fell into unconsciousness for four days. His hair fell out, he bled from his nose and gums, and purple spots broke out all over his body. Many others died from similar symptoms, but Okuda survived. He doesn't know why.

Okuda went on to a prosperous career in sales for a construction company, but 19 years ago he came down with liver disease and jaundice. He had to have his gall bladder removed. A legacy of the radiation? He doesn't know.

Three days after the bombing, Obayashi, now 76, returned to his family home, 20 miles outside Hiroshima. That night his father died of tuberculosis, unrelated to the A-bomb.

To care for his family, Obayashi went to work after the war for a company that made rationing coupons for sake.

His son lives in Los Angeles and works for Toshiba.

Yamaoka, 75, is still scarred. Her fingernails curve off her fingers at odd angles, and the skin on her hands is puffy and red. She can't twist the plastic cap off a bottle of water, and when someone snaps a picture of her, the flash makes her wince.

"I can't help it," she said. "It always reminds me of that day." She's undergone 27 skin grafts and other operations, in Japan and the United States. Yamaoka developed breast cancer years ago, and now has thyroid cancer. She has chosen to let it run its course. "I just can't go through another operation," she said.

All three now spend their days working for nuclear disarmament, lobbying world leaders, giving talks at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and telling their stories as living witnesses of nuclear war.

E-mail John Flinn at jflinn@sfchronicle.com.

Nuclear giants and ethical infants

► BOMB LIFE
From Page B1

Joseph Stalin, premier of the Soviet Union, then an ally in the war against Japan. After Truman received the news of the successful test, he was "a changed man" and "generally bossed the whole meeting," according to Churchill.

That the second bomb left San Francisco on the day the first was tested suggests the momentum to use it. Whether dropping the bomb was necessary to secure Japan's surrender before an invasion became necessary is still being debated. DeGroot believes that Japan was looking for a way to surrender in June and July. But there were other considerations, mostly to do with demonstrating American power, especially to the Soviet Union.

Using the bomb quickly became a test of patriotism. "For most Manhattan Project scientists the bomb was a deterrent, not a weapon," DeGroot writes. Physicist Leo Szilard had done as much as anyone to try to persuade FDR to develop the bomb because Germany was doing so. But on the day after that first test, he sent government officials a petition signed by 69 project scientists arguing that to use the bomb would ignite a dangerous arms race and damage America's postwar moral position, especially its ability to bring "the unloosed forces of destruction under control."

The petition was ignored, and Gen. J. Les-

lie Groves, the senior military official in charge of the project, began making a case that Szilard was a security risk. It's a pattern that would be repeated often.

DeGroot places the decision to drop the bomb on Japan in the context of the brutalization that occurred during the long years of World War II, with an unprecedented scope of savagery on both sides. The bombing of civilians and cities, morally unthinkable in the West before the war, became a major feature of it by its final years, long past the time many military targets were left. Gen. Groves, he writes, was worried that Japan might surrender before the bomb could be dropped.

Hiroshima was selected as the primary target because it had no allied POW camps. However, there were nearly 5,000 American children in the city — mainly children sent to Japan after their parents, U.S. citizens of Japanese origin, had been interred. It seems likely some of those children were from San Francisco.

The nuclear era began with the secrecy of the Manhattan Project, which is perhaps partly why it was accompanied throughout its history by lies and denial. It began with Hiroshima. As many as 75,000 people died in the first blast and fire. But in five years the death toll would reach 200,000 because of what the U.S. government denied existed: lethal radiation.

Even after the hydrogen bomb was developed in the 1950s (so powerful that the

first test vaporized an island and created a mile wide crater 175 feet deep), the untruths continued. In 1954, Dr. David Bradley reported on 46 Pacific islanders exposed to H-bomb fallout: nine children were born retarded, 10 more with other abnormalities, and three were stillborn, including one reported to be "not recognizable as human." Such information was denied or routinely suppressed through all the years of testing, even on U.S. soil. Groves even told Congress that death from radiation was "very pleasant."

Even after the war, criticizing the bomb in any way became a threat to national security, an act of disloyalty that only helped the communist enemy. And so people were silent and compliant, and streamed into air-conditioned theaters to see movies about monsters created by atomic radiation.

This extreme weapon prompted extreme and contrary emotions, often within the same people. Some of the same Los Alamos scientists who cheered madly at the first news of Hiroshima were later shell-shocked with regret. Gen. Omar Bradley called his contemporaries "nuclear giants and ethical infants." Yet he pushed for development of the hydrogen bomb.

This peculiar combination of denial plus the immense power of thousands of bombs contributed to an era of deadly absurdities: the age of Dr. Strangelove. Yet reality was not so different, right down to the



The cruiser Indianapolis took the bomb destined for Hiroshima from Hunters Point Naval Shipyard on July 16, 1945 and headed for Tinian Island.

preposterously appropriate names: the head of the Strategic Air Command, Gen. Tommy Power, gave his philosophy of nuclear war in 1960: "At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win!"

The warp in American political life created by the bomb might be summarized in two statements. "In order to make the country bear the burden," said President Dwight Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, referring to the Cold War arms race, "we have to create an emotional atmosphere akin to a wartime psychology. We must create the idea of a threat from without."

The second is more famous, but perhaps its connection to the bomb and its effect on America has been forgotten: Eisenhower's farewell address. "We have been compelled to create a permanent arms industry of vast proportions," he said. "We must not fail to comprehend its vast implications. . . . We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

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